LETTERS FROM A CHINESE OFFICIAL

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A CHINESE OFFICIAL
BEING AN EASTERN VIEW OF WESTERN CIVILIZATION

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INTRODUCTION TO THE AMERICAN EDITION

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In venturing to lay the following letters before the American public, I feel that I may be expected to preface them by a word of explanation, if not of apology. Written originally for the English, they touch upon specifically English institutions: and the few references they contain to contemporary history and politics are such as would naturally be of interest rather to European than to American readers. Regarded from this point of view, their publication in the United States might seem to be irrelevant, and even impertinent. And yet I venture to think that, if they have any significance, it is of a kind that should appeal with a peculiar force to Americans. For their interest, such as it is, depends, not upon topical allusions, but upon the whole contrast suggested between Eastern

and Western ideals. And America, in a pre-eminent degree, is representative of the West. For a century past she has drawn to herself, by an irresistible attraction, the boldest, the most masterful, the most practically intelligent of the spirits of Europe; just as, by the same law, she has repelled the sensitive, the contemplative, and the devout. Unconsciously, by the mere fact of her existence, she has sifted the nations; the children of the Spirit have slipped through the iron net of her destinies, but the children of the World she has gathered into her granaries. She has thus become, in a sense peculiar and unique, the type and exemplar of the Western world. Over her unencumbered plains the Genius of Industry ranges unchallenged, naked, unashamed. Whereas, in Europe, it has still to fight for its supremacy; for there it is confronted with the débris of an earlier society, with ideals, habits, institutions, monuments, traditions, alien to its achievement and incomprehensible to its aims. Cathedral churches, gray in the north and sublime as the cliffs and the

clouds, exuberant in the south with color and form like the lovely landscape they adorn, testify to the passage of a religion which, whatever its defects, had at least the merit of spiritual audacity. Splendid palaces, manors, and parks. ancient moss-grown cottages, perpetuate the tradition of ranks and orders, ancient, hereditary, and fixed. Titles, forms, manners, habits, a whole ritual of life, proclaim a standard, vanishing no doubt, of merit and of duty, not yet convertible into terms of money. A conception that leisure may be noble, and that activity may be base, that there is an inner, as well as an outer life, and that the latter, on any reasonable estimate, has value only as minister to the former, such a conception still survives, efficient in individual lives, and embodied in works of literature and of art. In Europe, in a word, the modern spirit has to contend with an ancient culture; and its methods and results are modified and transformed by the conflict. But in America it is free; and whatever truth there may be in my analysis of its character and operation, should

be illustrated, one would expect, on a larger scale, in bolder and more uncompromising manifestations, on this continent than in any of the countries of Europe. Whether that be so or not, I must leave to the candor of my American readers. But if it be, then, as I cannot but think, a serious issue is raised as to the future not merely of the United States, but of the whole Western world.

For it is impossible not to recognize that the destinies of Europe are closely bound up with those of this country; and that what is at stake in the development of the American Republic is nothing less than the success or failure of Western civilization. Endowed, above all the nations of the world, with intelligence, energy, and force, unhampered by the splendid ruins of a past which, however great, does but encumber, in the old world, with fears, hesitations, and regrets, the difficult march to the promised land of the future, combining the magnificent enthusiasm of youth with the wariness of maturer years, and animated by a confidence almost re-

ligious in their own destiny, the American people are called upon, it would seem, to determine, in a pre-eminent degree, the form that is to be assumed by the society of the future. Upon them hangs the fate of the Western world. And were I an American citizen, the thought would fill me, I confess, less with exultation than with anxious and grave reflection. I should ask myself whether the triumphs gained by my countrymen over matter and space had been secured at the cost of spiritual insight and force; whether their immense achievement in the development of the practical arts had been accompanied by any serious contribution to science, literature, and art; whether, in a word, the soul had grown with the body, or was tending to atrophy and decay. And looking back over the long history of mankind, considering the record of the nations who have borne in succession the torch of civilization which England, even now, is handing across to America, considering all that is disappearing in Europe and all that has not yet begun to show itself here, I should feel

that Humanity is standing at the parting of the ways, that it is confronted with an issue of a gravity and importance unparalleled, perhaps, since the fall of the Roman Empire. That issue I would put somewhat as follows: Is that which created the religion, the art, the speculation of the Past; that insatiable hunger for Eternity which, by a sacramental mystery, has transubstantiated into the heavenly essence of the Ideal, the base and quotidian elements of the Actual; that spirit of unquenchable aspiration which has assumed, in its tireless quest for embodiment, forms so alluring, so terrible, so divine, which has luxuriated in the jungle of Hindoo myths, blossomed in the Pantheon of the Greeks, suffered on the cross, perished at the stake, wasted in the cloister and the cell, which has given life to marble, substance to color, structure to fugitive sound, which has fashioned a palace of fire and cloud to inhabit for its desire, and deemed it, for its beauty, more dear and more real than kingdoms of iron and gold; —is that hunger, in the future as in the past,

to harass and hunt us from our styes? Is that spirit to urge as of old the reluctant wheels of our destiny? Or are we to fill our belly with the husks of comfort, security, and peace? To crush in the dust under our Juggernaut car that delicate charioteer? Are we to be spirits or intelligent brutes; men or mere machines? That is the question now put, as it has never been put before, to the nations of the West, and pre-eminently to the people of these States. Doubtless, were I an American, I should not question the capacity of my countrymen to answer it, and to answer it in the best and most fruitful sense. Yet the consciousness of the immensity of the problem would, I think, check at the birth any tendency which I might otherwise have indulged to premature exultation. For I should feel that the work had hardly been begun, that the foundations were barely laid; nay, that the very plan of the building was not yet drawn out. And looking across the ocean, to Europe and to the far East, I should be anxious, not indeed to imitate the forms, but to appropriate the inspira-

tion of that ancient world which created manners, laws, religion, art, whose history is the record not merely of the body, but of the soul of mankind, and whose spirit, already escaping from the forms in which it had found a partial embodiment, is hovering even now at your gates in quest of a new and more perfect incarnation. Will you not receive it? I do not doubt that you will, if not to-day, then to-morrow, if not to-morrow, then the day after. And if, in any smallest way, these few imperfect pages may contribute to prepare for it a welcome among you, you perhaps will pardon their defects, in recognition of a sincere intention, and will tolerate, even from a stranger, a certain freedom of speech which otherwise you might not unnaturally resent as an impertinence.

LETTERS FROM A CHINESE OFFICIAL

I

Recent events in China have brought into new prominence at once the fundamental antagonism between Eastern and Western civilization, and that ignorance and contempt of the one for the other which is mainly responsible for the present situation. In the face of the tragedy that is being enacted, I have long held my peace. But a growing sense of indignation, and a hope, perhaps illusory, that I may contribute to remove certain misunderstandings, have impelled me at last to open my lips, and to lay before the British public some views which have long been crying for utterance. Of the immediate crisis I do not propose to speak. It is my object rather to promote a juster estimate of my countrymen and their policy, by explaining, as far as I am able, the way in which we regard Western civilization, and the reasons we have for desiring to exclude its influences. For such a task I conceive myself

to be not altogether unfit. A long residence in England gives me some right to speak of your institutions; while absence from my own country has not disqualified me to speak of ours. A Chinaman remains always a Chinaman; and much as I admire in some of its aspects the achievement of Western civilization, I have yet seen nothing which could make me regret that I was born a citizen of the East. To Englishmen this may seem a strange confession. You are accustomed to regard us as barbarians, and not unnaturally, for it is only on the occasions when we murder your compatriots that your attention is powerfully drawn toward us. From such spasmodic outbreaks you are apt overhastily to infer that we are a nation of cold-blooded assassins; a conclusion as reasonable as would be an inference from the present conduct of your troops in China to the general character of Western civilization. We are not to be judged by the acts of our mobs, nor even, I may add, by those of our Government, for the Government in China does not represent the nation. Yet even

those acts (strongly as they are condemned by all educated Chinamen) deserve, I venture to think, on the part of Europeans, a consideration more grave, and a less intemperate reprobation, than they have hitherto received among you. For they are expressions of a feeling which is, and must always be, the most potent factor in our relations with the West—our profound mistrust and dislike of your civilization. This feeling you, naturally enough, attribute to prejudice and ignorance. In reality, I venture to think, it is based upon reason; and for this point of view I would ask the serious and patient consideration of my readers.

Our civilization is the oldest in the world. It does not follow that it is the best; but neither, I submit, does it follow that it is the worst. On the contrary, such antiquity is, at any rate, a proof that our institutions have guaranteed to us a stability for which we search in vain among the nations of Europe. But not only is our civilization stable, it also embodies, as we think, a moral order; while in yours we detect only an economic

chaos. Whether your religion be better than ours, I do not at present dispute; but it is certain that it has less influence on your society. You profess Christianity, but your civilization has never been Christian; whereas ours is Confucian through and through. But to say that it is Confucian, is to say that it is moral; or, at least (for I do not wish to beg the question), that moral relations are those which it primarily contemplates. Whereas, with you (so it seems to us) economic relations come first, and upon these you endeavor, afterward, to graft as much morality as they will admit.

This point I may illustrate by a comparison between your view of the family and ours. To you, so far as a foreigner can perceive, the family is merely a means for nourishing and protecting the child until he is of age to look after himself. As early as may be, you send your boys away to a public school, where they quickly emancipate themselves from the influences of their home. As soon as they are of age, you send them out, as you say, to "make their fortune";

and from that moment, often enough, as they cease to be dependent on their parents, so they cease to recognize obligations toward them. They may go where they will, do what they will, earn and spend as they choose; and it is at their own option whether or no they maintain their family ties. With you the individual is the unit, and all the units are free. No one is tied, but also no one is rooted. Your society, to use your own word, is "progressive"; you are always "moving on." Everyone feels it a duty (and in most cases it is a necessity) to strike out a new line for himself. To remain in the position in which you were born you consider a disgrace; a man, to be a man, must venture, struggle, compete, and win. To this characteristic of your society is to be attributed, no doubt, its immense activity, and its success in all material arts. But to this, also, is due the feature that most strikes a Chinaman—its unrest, its confusion, its lack (as we think) of morality. Among you no one is contented, no one has leisure to live, so intent are all on increasing the means of liv-

ing. The "cash-nexus" (to borrow a phrase of one of your own writers) is the only relation you recognize among men.

Now, to us of the East all this is the mark of a barbarous society. We measure the degree of civilization not by accumulation of the means of living, but by the character and value of the life lived. Where there are no humane and stable relations, no reverence for the past, no respect even for the present, but only a cupidinous ravishment of the future, there, we think, there is no true society. And we would not if we could rival you in your wealth, your sciences, and your arts, if we must do so at the cost of imitating your institutions.

In all these matters, our own procedure is the opposite to yours. We look first to the society and then to the individual. Among us, it is a rule that a man is born into precisely those relations in which he is to continue during the course of his life. As he begins, so he ends, a member of his family group, and to this condition the whole theory and practice of his life

conforms. He is taught to worship his ancestors, to honor and obey his parents, and to prepare himself from an early age for the duties of a husband and a father. Marriage does not dissolve the family; the husband remains, and the wife becomes a member of his group of kinsmen. And this group is the social unit. It has its common plot of ground, its common altar and rites, its tribunal for settling disputes among its members. No man in China is isolated, save by his own fault. If it is not so easy for him to grow rich as with you, neither is it so easy for him to starve; if he has not the motive to compete, neither has he the temptation to cheat and oppress. Free at once from the torment of ambition and the apprehension of distress, he has leisure to spare from the acquisition of the means of living for life itself. He has both the instinct and the opportunity to appreciate the gifts of Nature, to cultivate manners, and to enter into humane and disinterested relations with his fellows. The result is a type which we cannot but regard as superior, both morally and æsthetically,

to the great bulk of your own citizens in Europe. And while we recognize the greatness of your practical and scientific achievements, yet we find it impossible unreservedly to admire a civilization which has produced manners so coarse, morals so low, and an appearance so unlovely as those with which we are constantly confronted in your great cities. Admitting that we are not what you call a progressive people, we yet perceive that progress may be bought too dear. We prefer our own moral to your material advantages, and we are determined to cling to the institutions which, we believe, insure us the former, even at the risk of excluding ourselves from the latter.

II

In my last letter I endeavored to give some general account of the salient differences between your civilization and ours. Such differences have led inevitably to conflict; and recent events might seem to give some color to the idea that in that conflict it is we who have been the aggressors. But nothing in fact can be further from the truth. Left to ourselves, we should never have sought intercourse with the West. We have no motive to do so; for we desire neither to proselytize nor to trade. We believe, it is true, that our religion is more rational than yours, our morality higher, and our institutions more perfect; but we recognize that what is suited to us may be ill adapted to others. We do not conceive that we have a mission to redeem or to civilize the world, still less that that mission is to be accomplished by the methods of fire and

sword; and we are thankful enough if we can solve our own problems, without burdening ourselves with those of other peoples.

And as we are not led to interfere with you by the desire to convert you, so are we not driven to do so by the necessities of trade. Economically, as well as politically, we are sufficient to ourselves. What we consume we produce, and what we produce we consume. We do not require, and we have not sought, the products of other nations; and we hold it no less imprudent than unjust to make war on strangers in order to open their markets. A society, we conceive, that is to be politically stable must be economically independent; and we regard an extensive foreign trade as necessarily a source of social demoralization.

In these, as in all other points, your principle is the opposite to ours. You believe, not only that your religion is the only true one, but that it is your duty to impose it on all other nations, if need be, at the point of the sword. And this motive of aggression is reinforced by another

still more potent. Economically, your society is so constituted that it is constantly on the verge of starvation. You cannot produce what you need to consume, nor consume what you need to produce. It is matter of life and death to you to find markets in which you may dispose of your manufactures, and from which you may derive your food and raw material. Such a market China is, or might be; and the opening of this market is in fact the motive, thinly disguised, of all your dealings with us in recent years. The justice and morality of such a policy I do not propose to discuss. It is, in fact, the product of sheer material necessity, and upon such a ground it is idle to dispute. I shall confine myself therefore to an endeavor to present our view of the situation, and to explain the motives we have for resenting your aggression.

To the ordinary British trader it seems no doubt a strange thing that we should object to what he describes as the opening out of our national resources. Viewing everything, as he habitually does, from the standpoint of profit and

loss. he conceives that if it can be shown that a certain course will lead to the increase of wealth, it follows that that is the course that ought to be adopted. The opening of China to his capital and his trade he believes will have this result; and he concludes that it is our interest to welcome rather than to resist his enterprise. From his point of view he is justified; but his point of view is not ours. We are accustomed, before adopting any grave measure of policy, to estimate its effects not merely on the sum total of our wealth, but (which we conceive to be a very different thing) on our national well-being. You, as always, are thinking of the means of living; we, of the quality of the life lived. And when you ask us, as you do in effect, to transform our whole society, to convert ourselves from a nation of agriculturists to a nation of traders and manufacturers, to sacrifice to an imaginary prosperity our political and economic independence, and to revolutionize not only our industry, but our manners, morals, and institutions, we may be pardoned if we first take a critical look

at the effects which have been produced among yourselves by the conditions you urge us to introduce in China.

The results of such a survey, we venture to think, are not encouraging. Like the prince in the fable, you seem to have released from his prison the genie of competition, only to find that you are unable to control him. Your legislation for the past hundred years is a perpetual and fruitless effort to regulate the disorders of your economic system. Your poor, your drunk, your incompetent, your sick, your aged, ride you like a nightmare. You have dissolved all human and personal ties, and you endeavor, in vain, to replace them by the impersonal activity of the State. The salient characteristic of your civilization is its irresponsibility. You have liberated forces you cannot control; you are caught yourselves in your own levers and cogs. In every department of business you are substituting for the individual the company, for the workman the tool. The making of dividends is the universal preoccupation; the well-being of the laborer

is no one's concern but the State's. And this concern even the State is incompetent to undertake, for the factors by which it is determined are beyond its control. You depend on variations of supply and demand which you can neither determine nor anticipate. The failure of a harvest, the modification of a tariff in some remote country, dislocates the industry of millions, thousands of miles away. You are at the mercy of a prospector's luck, an inventor's genius, a woman's caprice—nay, you are at the mercy of your own instruments. Your capital is alive, and cries for food; starve it and it turns and throttles you. You produce, not because you will, but because you must; you consume, not what you choose, but what is forced upon you. Never was any trade so bound as this which you call free; but it is bound, not by a reasonable will, but by the accumulated irrationality of caprice.

Such is the internal economy of your State, as it presents itself to a Chinaman; and not more encouraging is the spectacle of your foreign re-

lations. Commercial intercourse between nations, it was supposed some fifty years ago, would inaugurate an era of peace; and there appear to be many among you who still cling to this belief. But never was belief more plainly contradicted by the facts. The competition for markets bids fair to be a more fruitful cause of war than was ever in the past the ambition of princes or the bigotry of priests. The peoples of Europe fling themselves, like hungry beasts of prey, on every yet unexploited quarter of the globe. Hitherto they have confined their acts of spoliation to those whom they regard as outside their own pale. But always, while they divide the spoil, they watch one another with a jealous eye; and sooner or later, when there is nothing left to divide, they will fall upon one another. That is the real meaning of your armaments; you must devour or be devoured. And it is precisely those trade relations, which it was thought would knit you in the bonds of peace, which, by making every one of you cut-throat rivals of the others, have brought you within

reasonable distance of a general war of extermination.

In thus characterizing your civilization, I am not (I think) carried away by a foolish Chauvinism, I do not conceive the inhabitants of Europe to be naturally more foolish and depraved than those of China. On the contrary, it is a cardinal tenet of our faith, that human nature is everywhere the same, and that it is circumstances that make it good or bad. If, then, your economy, internal or external, be really as defective as we conceive, the cause we think must be sought not in any radical defect in your national character, but in precisely those political and social institutions which you are urging us to adopt at home. Can you wonder, in the circumstances, that we resist your influence by any means at our command; and that the more intelligent among us, while they regret the violence to which your agents have been exposed, yet feel that it weighs as nothing in the scale, when set against the intolerable evils which would result from the success of your enterprise?

III

In one of your journals I recently read that "the civilization of China" is the ultimate object of the nations of Europe. If so, the methods they adopt to attain their end are singular indeed: but of these I do not trust myself to speak. Looting, wanton destruction, cold-blooded murder, and rape, these are the things which you do not, I know, here in England approve, which you would prevent, I am convinced, if you could, and which I am willing to set down to the license of ill-disciplined troops. It is for another purpose than that of idle deprecation that I refer to them in this place. The question always before my mind when you speak of civilization is this: What kind of men has your civilization produced? And to such a question current events in China seem to suggest an answer not altogether reassuring. But that answer I do not press. It may be that all culture, ours as much as yours, is no more than a veneer; that

deep in the den of every human heart lurks the brute, ready to leap on its prey when chance or design has unbarred the gates. We at any rate, in China, lie under the same condemnation as you; and our reproaches, like yours, fly back to the mouths of them that utter them. I pass, therefore, from scenes like these to normal conditions of life. What manner of men, I ask, are we, what manner of men are you, that you should take upon yourselves to call us barbarians?

What manner of men are we? The question is hard to answer. Turning it over in my thoughts, hour after hour, day after day, I can hit on no better device to bring home to you something of what is in my mind than to endeavor to set down here, as faithfully as I can, a picture that never ceases to haunt my memory as I walk in these dreary winter days the streets of your black Metropolis.

Far away in the East, under sunshine such as you never saw (for even such light as you have you stain and infect with sooty smoke), on the

shore of a broad river stands the house where I was born. It is one among thousands; but every one stands in its own garden, simply painted in white or gray, modest, cheerful, and clean. For many miles along the valley, one after the other, they lift their blue- or red-tiled roofs out of a sea of green; while here and there glitters out over a clump of trees the gold enamel of some tall pagoda. The river, crossed by frequent bridges and crowded with barges and junks, bears on its clear stream the traffic of thriving village-markets. For prosperous peasants people all the district, owning and tilling the fields their fathers owned and tilled before them. The soil on which they work, they may say, they and their ancestors have made. For see! almost to the summit what once were barren hills are waving green with cotton and rice, sugar, oranges, and tea. Water drawn from the river-bed girdles the slopes with silver; and falling from channel to channel in a thousand bright cascades, plashing in cisterns, chuckling in pipes, soaking and oozing in the soil, distributes freely

to all alike fertility, verdure, and life. Hour after hour you may traverse, by tortuous paths, over tiny bridges, the works of the generations who have passed, the labors of their children of to-day; till you reach the point where man succumbs and Nature has her way, covering the highest crags with a mantle of azure and gold and rose, gardenia, clematis, azalea, growing luxuriantly wild. How often here have I sat for hours in a silence so intense that, as one of our poets has said, "you may hear the shadows of the trees rustling on the ground"; a silence broken only now and again from far below by voices of laborers calling across the water-courses, or, at evening or dawn, by the sound of gongs summoning to worship from the temples in the valley. Such silence! Such sounds! Such perfume! Such color! The senses respond to their objects; they grow exquisite to a degree you cannot well conceive in your northern climate; and beauty pressing in from without moulds the spirit and mind insensibly to harmony with herself. If in China we have man-

ners, if we have art, if we have morals, the reason, to those who can see, is not far to seek. Nature has taught us; and so far, we are only more fortunate than you. But, also, we have had the grace to learn her lesson; and that, we think, we may ascribe to our intelligence. For, consider, here in this lovely valley live thousands of souls without any law save that of custom, without any rule save that of their own hearths. Industrious they are, as you hardly know industry in Europe; but it is the industry of free men working for their kith and kin, on the lands they received from their fathers, to transmit, enriched by their labors, to their sons. They have no other ambition; they do not care to amass wealth; and if in each generation some must needs go out into the world, it is with the hope, not commonly frustrated, to return to the place of their birth and spend their declining years among the scenes and faces that were dear to their youth. Among such a people there is no room for fierce, indecent rivalries. None is master, none servant; but equality, concrete and real, regulates and

sustains their intercourse. Healthy toil, sufficient leisure, frank hospitality, a content born of habit and undisturbed by chimerical ambitions, a sense of beauty fostered by the loveliest Nature in the world, and finding expression in gracious and dignified manners where it is not embodied in exquisite works of art—such are the characteristics of the people among whom I was born. Does my memory flatter me? Do I idealize the scenes of my youth? It may be so. But this I know: that some such life as I have described, reared on the basis of labor on the soil, of equality and justice, does exist and flourish throughout the length and breadth of China. What have you to offer in its place, you our would-be civilizers? Your religion? Alas! it is in the name of that that you are doing unnamable deeds! Your morals? Where shall we find them? Your intelligence? Whither has it led? What counter-picture have you to offer over here in England to this which I have drawn of life in China? That is the question which I have now to endeavor to reply.

IV

In attempting to lay before you a characteristic scene of Chinese life I selected for the purpose a community of peasants. I did so because it is there that I find the typical product of our civilization. Cities, it is true, we have, and cities as monstrous, perhaps, as yours; but they are mere excrescences on a body politic whose essential constitution is agricultural. With you all this is reversed; and for that reason you have no country life deserving the name. On the one hand waste of common and moor, on the other villas and parks, laborers poorly clad, wretchedly housed, and miserably paid, dreary villages, decaying farms, squalor, brutality, and vice—such is the picture you give, yourselves, of your agricultural districts. Whatever in England is not urban is parasitic or moribund. If, then, I am to give an impression that shall be candid and just of the best results of your civilization,

I must turn from the country to the life of your great cities. And in doing so I will not seek to win an easy victory by dwelling unduly on those more obvious points which you no less than I admit and deplore. Your swarming slums, your liquor-saloons, your poor-houses, your prisons—these, it is true, are melancholy facts. But the evils of which they are symptoms you are setting yourselves to cure, and your efforts, I do not doubt, may be attended with a large measure of success. It is rather the goal to which you seem to be moving when you have done the best you can that I would choose to consider in this place. Your typical product, your average man, the man you call respectable, him it is that I wish to characterize, for he it is that is the natural and inevitable outcome of your civilization. What manner of man, then, is he? It is with some hesitation that I set myself to answer this question. I am a stranger among you; I have enjoyed your hospitality; and I am loath to seem to repay you with discourtesy. But if there be any service I can do you, I know none greater

than to bring home to you, if I could, without undue offence, certain important truths (so they seem to me) to which you appear to be singularly blind. Your feet, I believe, are set on the wrong path; I would fain warn you; and useless though the warning may be, it is offered in the spirit of friendship, and in that spirit, I hope, it will be received.

When I review my impressions of the average English citizen, impressions based on many years' study, what kind of man do I see? I see one divorced from Nature, but unreclaimed by Art; instructed, but not educated; assimilative, but incapable of thought. Trained in the tenets of a religion in which he does not really believe —for he sees it flatly contradicted in every relation of life—he dimly feels that it is prudent to conceal under a mask of piety the atheism he is hardly intelligent enough to avow. His religion is conventional; and, what is more important, his morals are as conventional as his creed. Charity, chastity, self-abnegation, contempt of the world and its prizes—these are the

words on which he has been fed from his childhood upward. And words they have remained, for neither has he anywhere seen them practised by others, nor has it ever occurred to him to practise them himself. Their influence, while it is strong enough to make him a chronic hypocrite, is not so strong as to show him the hypocrite he is. Deprived on the one hand of the support of a true ethical standard, embodied in the life of the society of which he is a member, he is duped, on the other, by lip-worship of an impotent ideal. Abandoned thus to his instinct, he is content to do as others do, and, ignoring the things of the spirit, to devote himself to material ends. He becomes a mere tool; and of such your society is composed. By your works you may be known. Your triumphs in the mechanical arts are the obverse of your failure in all that calls for spiritual insight. Machinery of every kind you can make and use to perfection; but you cannot build a house, or write a poem, or paint a picture; still less can you worship or aspire. Look at your streets! Row

upon row of little boxes, one like another, lacking in all that is essential, loaded with all that is superfluous—this is what passes among you for architecture. Your literature is the daily press, with its stream of solemn fatuity, of anecdotes, puzzles, puns, and police-court scandal. Your pictures are stories in paint, transcripts of all that is banal, clumsily botched by amateurs as devoid of tradition as of genius. Your outer sense as well as your inner is dead; you are blind and deaf. Ratiocination has taken the place of perception; and your whole life is an infinite syllogism from premises you have not examined to conclusions you have not anticipated or willed. Everywhere means, nowhere an end! Society a huge engine, and that engine itself out of gear! Such is the picture your civilization presents to my imagination. I will not say that it is so that it appears to every intelligent Chinaman; for the Chinese, unlike you, are constitutionally averse to drawing up an indictment against a nation. If I have been led into that error, it is under strong provocation; and already

I feel that I owe you an apology. Yet what I have said I cannot withdraw; and I shall not regret that I have spoken if I may hope that my words have suggested to some among my readers a new sense in the cry, "China for the Chinese!"

V

When I was first brought into contact with the West what most immediately impressed me was the character and range of your intelligence. I found that you had brought your minds to bear, with singular success, upon problems which had not even occurred to us in the East; that by analysis and experiment you had found the clue to the operation of the forces of nature, and had turned them to account in ways which, to my untravelled imagination, appeared to be little short of miraculous. Nor has familiarity diminished my admiration for your achievements in this field. I recognize in them your chief and most substantial claim to superiority, and I am not surprised that some of the more intelligent of my countrymen should be advocating with ardor their immediate introduction into China. I sympathize with the enthusiasm of these reformers, but I am unable, nevertheless, to endorse their

policy; and it may be worth while to set down here the reasons which have led me to a conclusion which may appear at first sight to be paradoxical.

The truth is that a study of your history during the past century and a closer acquaintance with the structure of your society has considerably modified my original point of view. I have learnt that the most brilliant discoveries, the most fruitful applications of inventive genius, do not of themselves suffice for the well-being of society; and that an intelligence which is concentrated exclusively on the production of labor-saving machines may easily work more harm by the dislocation of industry than it can accomplish good by the increase of wealth. For the increase of wealth—that is, of the means to comfort—is not, to my mind, necessarily good in itself; everything depends on the way in which the wealth is distributed and on its effect on the moral character of the nation. And it is from that point of view that I look with some dismay upon the prospect of the in-

troduction of Western methods into China. An example will best explain my point. When we began to construct our first railway, from Tientsin to Peking, the undertaking excited among the neighboring populace an opposition which quickly developed into open riot. The line was torn up, bridges were destroyed, and it was impossible to continue the work. We therefore, according to our custom in China, sent down to the scene of action, not a force of police, but an official to interview the rioters and ascertain their point of view. It was as usual a perfectly reasonable one. They were a boating population, subsisting by the traffic of the canal, and they feared that the railway would deprive them of their means of livelihood. The Government recognized the justice of their plea, they gave the required guarantee that the traffic by water should not seriously suffer, and there was no further trouble or disturbance. The episode is a good illustration of the way in which we regard these questions. Englishmen to whom I have spoken of the matter have invari-

ably listened to my account with astonishment not unmingled with indignation. To them it seems a monstrous thing that Government should pay any regard whatever to such representations on the part of the people. They speak of the laws of supply and demand, of the ultimate absorption of labor, of competition, progress, mobility and the "long-run." To all this I listen with more or less comprehension and acquiescence; but it cannot conceal from me the fact that the introduction of new methods means, at any rate for the moment, so much dislocation of labor, so much poverty, suffering, and starvation. Of this your own industrial history gives abundant proof. And I cannot but note with regret and disappointment that in all these years during which you have been perfecting the mechanical arts you have not apparently even attempted, you certainly have not attempted with success, to devise any means to obviate the disturbance and distress to which you have subjected your laboring population. This, indeed, is not surprising, for it is your custom to subordinate life

to wealth; but neither, to a Chinaman, is it encouraging; and I, at least, cannot contemplate without the gravest apprehension the disorders which must inevitably ensue among our population of four hundred millions upon the introduction, on a large scale, of Western methods of industry. You will say that the disorder is temporary; to me it appears, in the West, to be chronic. But putting that aside, what, I may ask, are we to gain? The gain to you is palpable; so, I think, is the loss to us. But where is our gain? The question, perhaps, may seem to you irrelevant; but a Chinaman may be forgiven for thinking it important. You will answer, no doubt, that we shall gain wealth. Perhaps we shall; but shall we not lose life? Shall we not become like you? And can you expect us to contemplate that with equanimity? What are your advantages? Your people, no doubt, are better equipped than ours with some of the less important goods of life; they eat more, drink more, sleep more; but there their superiority ends. They are less cheerful, less

contented, less industrious, less law-abiding; their occupations are more unhealthy both for body and mind; they are crowded into cities and factories, divorced from Nature and the ownership of the soil. On all this I have already dwelt at length; I only recur to it here in explanation of a position which may appear to you to be perverse—the position of one who, while genuinely admiring the products of Western intelligence, yet doubts whether that intelligence has not been misapplied, or at least whether its direction has not been so one-sided that it is likely to have been productive of as much harm as good. You may, indeed—and I trust you will—rectify this error and show yourselves as ingenious in organizing men as you have been in dominating Nature. But meantime we may, perhaps, be pardoned if even when we most admire we yet hesitate to adopt your Western methods, and feel that the advantages which might possibly ensue will be dearly bought by the disorders that have everywhere accompanied their introduction.

And there is another point which weighs with

me, one less obvious, perhaps, but not less important. In any society it must always be the case that the mass of men are absorbed in mechanical labors. It is so in ours no less, though certainly no more, than in yours; and, so far, this condition does not appear to have been affected by the introduction of machinery. But, on the other hand, in every society there are, or should be, men who are relieved from this servitude to matter and free to devote themselves to higher ends. In China, for many centuries past, there has been a class of men set apart from the first to the pursuit of liberal arts, and destined to the functions of government. These men form no close hereditary caste; it is open to anyone to join them who possesses the requisite talent and inclination: and in this respect our society has long been the most democratic in the world. The education to which we subject this official class is a matter of frequent and adverse comment among you, and it is not my intention here to undertake its defence. What I wish to point out is the fact that, by virtue of this in-

stitution, we have inculcated and we maintain among our people of all classes a respect for the things of the mind and of the spirit, to which it would be hard to find a parallel in Europe, and of which, in particular, there is no trace in England. In China letters are respected not merely to a degree but in a sense which must seem, I think, to you unintelligible and overstrained. But there is a reason for it. Our poets and literary men have taught their successors, for long generations, to look for good not in wealth, not in power, not in miscellaneous activity, but in a trained, a choice, an exquisite appreciation of the most simple and universal relations of life. To feel, and in order to feel to express, or at least to understand the expression of all that is lovely in Nature, of all that is poignant and sensitive in man, is to us in itself a sufficient end. A rose in a moonlit garden, the shadow of trees on the turf, almond bloom, scent of pine, the wine-cup and the guitar; these and the pathos of life and death, the long embrace, the hand stretched out in vain, the moment that glides for ever away, with its

freight of music and light, into the shadow and hush of the haunted past, all that we have, all that eludes us, a bird on the wing, a perfume escaped on the gale—to all these things we are trained to respond, and the response is what we call literature. This we have; this you cannot give us; but this you may so easily take away. Amid the roar of looms it cannot be heard; it cannot be seen in the smoke of factories; it is killed by the wear and the whirl of Western life. And when I look at your business men, the men whom you most admire; when I see them hour after hour, day after day, year after year, toiling in the mill of their forced and undelighted labors; when I see them importing the anxieties of the day into their scant and grudging leisure, and wearing themselves out less by toil than by carking and illiberal cares, I reflect, I confess, with satisfaction on the simpler routine of our ancient industry, and prize, above all your new and dangerous routes, the beaten track so familiar to our accustomed feet that we have leisure, even while we pace it, to turn our gaze up to the eternal stars.

VI

Among Chinese institutions there is none that provokes the European mind to more hostile and contemptuous comment than our system of government. The inadequate salaries of our officials and the consequent temptation, to which they frequently succumb, to extort money by illegitimate means, is productive of much annoyance to foreigners; nor have I anything to say in defence of a practice so manifestly undesirable. At the same time, I cannot but note that corruption of this kind is a far less serious evil in China than it is, when it prevails, among yourselves. With you the function of government is so important and so ubiquitous that you can hardly realize the condition of a people that is able almost wholly to dispense with it. Yet such is our case. The simple and natural character of our civilization, the peaceable nature of our people (when they are not maddened by the ag-

gression of foreigners), above all, the institution of the family, itself a little state—a political, social, and economic unit—these and other facts have rendered us independent of government control to an extent which to Europeans may seem incredible. Neither the acts nor the omissions of the authorities at Peking have any real or permanent effect on the life of our masses, except so far as they register the movements of popular sentiment and demand. Otherwise, as you foreigners know to your cost, they remain a dead-letter. The Government may make conventions and treaties, but it cannot put them into effect, except in so far as they are endorsed by public opinion. The passive resistance of so vast a people, rooted in a tradition so immemorial, will defeat in the future, as it has done in the past, the attempts of the Western Powers to impose their will on the nation through the agency of the Government. No force will ever suffice to stir that huge inertia. The whirlwind of war for a moment may ruffle the surface of the sea, may fleck with foam its superficial cur-

rents; it will never shake or trouble the clear unfathomable deep which is the still and brooding soul of China.

If our people are ever to be moved, their reason and their heart must be convinced; and this lesson, which you in Europe are so slow to learn, was embodied centuries ago in the practice and theory of our State. Government with us is based on the consent of the people to a degree which you of the West can hardly understand, much less imitate. What you have striven so vainly to achieve by an increasingly elaborate machinery happens among us by the mere force of facts. Our fundamental institutions are no arbitrary inventions of power; they are the form which the people have given to their life. No Government created and no Government would think of modifying them. And if from time to time it becomes desirable to add to them such further regulations as the course of events may seem to suggest, these, too, are introduced only in response to a real demand, and after proof made of their efficacy and popularity. Law, in

a word, is not, with us, a rule imposed from above; it is the formula of the national life; and its embodiment in practice precedes its inscription in a code. Hence it is that in China government is neither arbitrary nor indispensable. Destroy our authorities, central and provincial, and our life will proceed very much as before. The law we obey is the law of our own nature, as it has been evolved by centuries of experience, and to this we continue our allegiance, even though the external sanction be withdrawn. Come what may, the family remains, with all that it involves, the attitude of mind remains, the spirit of order, industry, and thrift. These it is that make up China; and the Governments we have passively received are Governments only so long as they understand that it is not theirs to govern, but merely to express in outward show, to formulate and define, an order which in essentials they must accept as they accept the motions of the heavens. China does not change. The tumults of which you make so much, and of which you are yourselves the cause,

are no signs of the break-up of our civilization. You hear the breakers roaring on the shore; but far away beyond your ken, unsailed by ship of yours, stretch to the blue horizon the silent spaces of the sea.

How different is the conception and fact of government in the West! Here there are no fundamental laws, but an infinity of arbitrary rules. Nothing roots except what has been planted; nothing is planted but what must be planted again. During the past hundred years you have dismantled your whole society. Property and marriage, religion, morality, distinctions of rank and class, all that is most important and most profound in human relationships, has been torn from the roots and floats like wreckage down the stream of time. Hence the activity of your Governments, for it is only by their aid that your society holds together at all. Government with you is thus important to an extent and degree happily inconceivable in the East. This in itself appears to me an evil; but it is one that I see to be inevitable. All the

more am I surprised at what I cannot but regard as the extraordinary inefficiency of the machinery on which you rely to accomplish so vast a work. It is, I am aware, hard, perhaps impossible, to discover or devise any sure and certain method of selecting competent men; but surely it is strange to make no attempt to ascertain or secure any degree of moral or intellectual capacity in those to whom you entrust such important functions! Our own plan in China of selecting our rulers by competitive examination is regarded by you with a contempt not altogether undeserved. Yet you adopt it yourselves in the choice of your subordinate officials; and it has at least the merit of embodying the rational idea that the highest places in the Government should be open to all, rich or poor, who have given proof of ability and talent, and that they should be open to no others. Compared to the method of election it appears to me to be reason itself. For what does election mean? You say that it means representation of the people; but do you not know in your hearts that it means, and can

mean, nothing of the kind? What is really represented is Interests. And in what are Interests interested? Your reply, I suspect, will be, In public abuses! Landlords, brewers, railway directors—is it not these that really rule you? And must it not be so while your society is constituted as it is? There is, I am aware, a party which hopes to bring to bear against these the brute and overwhelming force of the Mass. But such a remedy, even if it were practicable, does not commend itself to my judgment; for the Mass in your society is itself an Interest. The machinery which you have provided appears to aim at bringing together in a cockpit egotistic forces bent upon private goods, in order that they may arrive, by dint of sheer fighting, at a result which shall represent the good of the whole. It is perhaps the inveterate respect, inherent in every Chinaman, for the authority of morality and reason, that prevents me from regarding such a procedure with the enthusiasm or even the toleration which it seems commonly to arouse among yourselves. When problems of

such vast importance have devolved upon, and must be assumed by, a Government, I cannot but think that some better means might have been devised for interesting in their solution the best talent of the nation. And I am confirmed in this view by the reflection that I have met in your universities and elsewhere men who have profoundly studied the questions your Legislature is expected to determine, whose intelligence is clear, whose judgment unbiassed, whose enthusiasm disinterested and pure, but who can never hope for a chance of putting their wisdom to practical effect, because their temperament, their training, and their habit of life, have unfitted them for the ordeal of popular election. To be a member of Parliament is, it would seem, a profession in itself, and the qualities, intellectual and moral, which open the door to a public career appear to be distinct from, and even incompatible with, those which contribute to public utility.

VII

To grave and fundamental distinctions of national character and life commonly correspond similar distinctions in religious belief. For religion is, or should be, the soul of which the State is the body, the idea which informs and perpetuates institutions. It is not, I am aware, in this sense that the word is always understood, for religion is not seldom identified with superstition. I propose, however, in this place to distinguish the two, and to concern myself mainly with what I conceive to be properly termed religion. But I note, at the outset, that among the masses of China superstition is as widely spread as among those of any European country. Buddhism and Taoism lend themselves with us to practices and beliefs as regrettable and absurd as any that are fostered by Christianity among yourselves. Our people, like yours, hope by ritual and prayer to affect the course of the

elements or to compass private and material benefits; they believe in spirits and goblins, as Roman Catholics do in saints; they worship idols, practise magic, and foster the impositions of priests. But all this I pass by as extraneous to true religion. I regard it merely as a manifestation of the weakness of human nature, a vent for the peccant humors of the individual soul. Different indeed is the creed and the cult on which our civilization is founded; and it is to this, which has been so much misunderstood by Europeans, that I propose to devote a few words of explanation.

Confucianism, it is sometimes said, is not a religion at all; and if by religion be meant a set of dogmatic propositions dealing with a supernatural world radically distinct from our own, the statement is, no doubt, strictly true. It was, in fact, one of the objects of Confucius to discourage preoccupation with the supernatural, and the true disciple endeavors in this respect to follow in his master's footsteps. "Beware of religion," a Mandarin says, meaning "beware of

superstition"; and in this sense, but in this sense only, Confucianism is irreligious. Again, it is said that Confucianism is merely an ethical system; and this, too, is true, in so far as its whole aim and purport is to direct and inspire right conduct. But, on the other hand—and this is the point I wish to make—it is not merely a teaching, but a life. The principles it enjoins are those which are actually embodied in the structure of our society, so that they are inculcated not merely by written and spoken word, but by the whole habit of everyday experience. The unity of the family and the State, as expressed in the worship of ancestors, is the basis not merely of the professed creed, but of the actual practice of a Chinaman. To whatever other faith he may adhere—Buddhist, Taoist, Christian—this is the thing that really matters to him. To him the generations past and the generations to come form with those that are alive one single whole. All live eternally, though it is only some that happen at any moment to live upon earth. Ancestor-worship is

thus the symbol of a social idea immense in its force to consolidate and bind. Its effects in China must be seen to be believed; but you have a further example in a civilization with which you are better acquainted—I mean, of course, the civilization of Rome.

This, then, is the first and most striking aspect of our national religion; but there is another hardly less important in its bearing on social life. Confucianism is the exponent of the ideal of work. Your eighteenth-century observers, who laid so much stress on the ritual of the Emperor's yearly ploughing, were nearer to the heart of our civilization than many later and less sympathetic inquirers. The duty of man to labor, and primarily to labor on the soil, is a fundamental postulate of our religion. Hence the worship of Mother Earth, the source of all increase; hence the worship of Heaven, the giver of light and rain; and hence also that social system whose aim is to secure a general access to the soil. The willing dedication of all, in brotherhood and peace, to labor blessed by the

powers of heaven and earth, such is the simple, intelligible ideal we have set before our people, such is the conception we have embodied in our institutions. And if you seek more than this, a metaphysical system to justify and explain our homely creed, that too we have provided for our scholars. Humanity, they are taught, is a Being spiritual and eternal, manifesting itself in time in the series of generations. This Being is the mediator between heaven and earth, between the ultimate ideal and the existing fact. By labor, incessant and devout, to raise earth to heaven, to realize, in fact, the good that as yet exists only in idea—that is the end and purpose of human life; and in fulfilling it we achieve and maintain our unity each with every other, and all with the Divine. Here, surely, is a faith not unworthy to be called a religion. I do not say that it is consciously held by the mass of the people, for in no State does the mass of the people reflect. But I claim for us that the life of our masses is so ordered and disposed as to accord with the postulates of our creed; that

they practise, if they do not profess, the tenets of our sages; and that the two cardinal ideas on which every society should rest, brotherhood and the dignity of labor, are brought home to them in direct and unmistakable form by the structure of our secular institutions.

Such, then, in a few words, is the essence of Confucianism, as it appears to an educated Chinaman. Far harder is it for me, though I have spent so long in Europe, to appreciate the significance of Christianity. But perhaps I may be pardoned if I endeavor to record my impressions, such as they are, gathered from some study of your sacred books, your history, and your contemporary life. In such observations as I have made I have had in view the question not so much of the truth of your religion—of that I do not feel competent to judge—as of its bearing upon your social institutions. And here, more than anywhere, I am struck by the wide discrepancy between your civilization and ours. I cannot see that your society is based upon religion at all; nor does that surprise me, if I

have rightly apprehended the character of Christianity. For the ideal which I seem to find enshrined in your gospels and embodied in the discussions of your divines is one not of labor on earth, but of contemplation in heaven; not of the unity of the human race, but of the communion of saints. Whether this be a higher ideal than our own I do not venture to pronounce; but I cannot but hold it to be less practicable. It must be difficult, one would think, if not impossible to found any stable society on the conception that life upon earth is a mere episode in a drama whose centre of action lies elsewhere. An indifference to what, from a more mundane point of view, must appear to be fundamental considerations, a confusion of temporal distinctions in the white blaze of eternity, a haphazard organization of those details of corporate life the serious preoccupation with which would be hardly compatible with religion—such would appear to be the natural result of a genuine profession of Christianity. And such, if I understand it aright, was the character of your

civilization in what you describe as the Ages of Faith. Asceticism, monastic vows, the domination of priests, the petty interests of life and death overshadowed and dwarfed by the tremendous issues of heaven and hell, beggary sanctified, wealth contemned, reason stunted, imagination hypertrophied, the spiritual and temporal powers at war, body at feud with soul, everywhere division, conflict, confusion, intellectual and moral insanity—such was the character of that extraordinary epoch in Western history when the Christian conception made a bid to embody itself in fact. It was the life-and-death struggle of a grandiose ideal against all the facts of the material and moral universe. And in that struggle the ideal was worsted. From the dust of battle the Western world emerged, as it had entered, secular: avowedly worldly, frankly curious, bent with a passionate zeal on the mastery of all the forces of nature, on beauty, wealth, intelligence, character, power. From that time on, although you still profess Christianity, no attempt has been made to chris-

tianize your institutions. On the contrary, it has been your object to sweep away every remnant of the old order, to dissociate Church from State, ritual and belief from action. You have abandoned your society frankly to economic and political forces, with results which I have endeavored in an earlier letter to characterize.

But while thus, on the one hand, your society has evolved on a purely material basis, on the other religion has not ceased to be recognized among you. Only, cut off from its natural root in social institutions, it has assumed forms which I cannot but think to be either otiose or dangerous. Those who profess Christianity—and there are few who, in one way or another, do not—either profess it only with their lips, and having in this way satisfied those claims of the ideal from which no human being is altogether free, turn back with an unencumbered mind and conscience to the pursuit of egotistic ends; or else, being seriously possessed by the teachings of Christ, they find themselves almost inevitably driven into the position of revolutionists. For

those teachings, if they be fully accepted and fairly interpreted, must be seen to be incompatible with the whole structure of your society. Enunciated, centuries ago, by a mild Oriental enthusiast, unlettered, untravelled, inexperienced, they are remarkable not more for their tender and touching appeal to brotherly love than for their aversion or indifference to all other elements of human excellence. The subject of Augustus and Tiberius lived and died unaware of the history and destinies of imperial Rome; the contemporary of Virgil and of Livy could not read the language in which they wrote. Provincial by birth, mechanic by trade, by temperament a poet and a mystic, he enjoyed in the course of his brief life few opportunities, and he evinced little inclination, to become acquainted with the rudiments of the science whose end is the prosperity of the State. The production and distribution of wealth, the disposition of power, the laws that regulate labor, property, trade, these were matters as remote from his interests as they were beyond his comprehension.

Never was man better equipped to inspire a religious sect; never one worse to found or direct a commonwealth. Yet this man it is whose naïve maxims of self-abnegation have been accepted as gospel by the nations of the West, the type of all that is predatory, violent, and aggressive. No wonder your history has been one long and lamentable tale of antagonism, tumult, carnage, and confusion! No wonder the spiritual and temporal powers have oscillated between open war and truces as discreditable to the one as to the other! No wonder that down to the present day every man among you who has been genuinely inspired with the spirit of your religion has shrunk in horror from the society which purports to have adopted its principles as its own! It is the Nemesis of an idealist creed that it cannot inform realities; it can but mass together outside and in opposition to the established order the forces that should have shaped and controlled it from within. The spirit remains unembodied, the body uninformed. So is has been and so it is with this polity of yours.

It purports to represent a superhuman ideal; in reality, it does not represent even one that is human. It is of the earth, earthy; while from heaven far above cries, like a ghost's, the voice of the Nazarene, as pure, as clear, as ineffectual, as when first it flung from the shores of Galilee its challenge to the world-sustaining power of Rome.

The view which I have thus ventured to give, candidly, as I feel it, of the relation of your society to your religion, will, I am aware, be received by most of my readers with astonishment, if not with indignation. Permit me, then, to illustrate and confirm it by an example so patent and palpable that it cannot fail, I think, to make some appeal even to those who are most unwilling to face the truth.

If there is one feature more marked than another in the teaching of Christ it is his condemnation of every form of violence. No one can read the Gospels with an unprejudiced mind without being struck by the emphasis with which he reiterates this doctrine. "Whosoever shall

smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also." These are his words, and they are spoken in sober earnestness, not in metaphor, nor yet as a counsel of perfection, something that should be but cannot be put into effect. No! they are the words of conviction and truth, backed by the whole character and practice of their author. The principle they embody may, of course, be disputed. It may be held—as in fact it always has been held by the majority of men in all ages—that force is essential to the preservation of society; that without it there could be no security, no order, no peace. But one who holds this view cannot be a Christian, in the proper sense of a follower of Christ. If, then, as is undoubtedly the case, this view has been universally held throughout their whole history by the nations of the West, then, whatever they may call themselves, they cannot be truly Christian. Yet this consequence they have always refused to accept. They have interpreted the words of their founder to mean the reverse of what they say, and have conceived

him, apparently without any sense of the solecism they were perpetrating, to be the defender and champion not only of their whole system of law, based as it is on the prison and the scaffold, but of all their wars, even of those which to the natural sense of mankind must appear to be the least defensible and the most iniquitous. In proof of what I say—if proof be required—I need not recur to historical examples. It will be enough to refer to the case which is naturally most present to my mind—the recent attack of the Western Powers on China. That there was grave provocation, I am not concerned to deny, though it was not with us that the provocation originated. But what fills me with amazement and even, if I must be frank, with horror, is the fact that the nations of Europe should attempt to justify their acts from the standpoint of the Gospel of Christ; and that there should be found among them a Christian potentate who, in sending forth his soldiers on an errand of revenge, should urge them, in the name of him who bade us turn the other cheek, not merely

to attack, not merely to kill, but to kill without quarter! What further proof is needed of the truth of my general proposition that the religion you profess, whatever effect it may have on individual lives, has little or none on public policy? It may inspire, here and there, some retired saint; it has never inspired those who control the State. What use is it, then, to profess that, in essence, it is a religion higher than ours? I care not to dispute on ground so barren. "By their fruits ye shall know them," said your own prophets; and to their fruits I am content to appeal. Confucianism may, as you affirm, be no religion at all; it may be an inferior ethical code; but it has made of the Chinese the one nation in all the history of the world who genuinely abhor violence and reverence reason and right. And here, lest you think that I am biassed, let me call to my aid the testimony of the one among your countrymen who has known us intimately and long, and whose services to our State will never be forgotten by any patriotic Chinaman. In place of the ignorant diatribes

of your special correspondents, listen for a moment to the voice of Sir Robert Hart:

"They are," he says of the Chinese, "well-behaved, law-abiding, intelligent, economical, and industrious; they can learn anything and do anything; they are punctiliously polite, they worship talent, and they believe in right so firmly that they scorn to think it requires to be supported or enforced by might; they delight in literature, and everywhere they have their literary clubs and coteries for learning and discussing each other's essays and verses; they possess and practise an admirable system of ethics, and they are generous, charitable, and fond of good works; they never forget a favor, they make rich return for any kindness, and, though they know money will buy service, a man must be more than wealthy to win public esteem and respect; they are practical, teachable, and wonderfully gifted with common-sense; they are excellent artisans, reliable workmen, and of a good faith that everyone acknowledges and admires in their commercial dealings; in no

country that is or was, has the commandment 'Honor thy father and thy mother' been so religiously obeyed, or so fully and without exception given effect to, and it is in fact the keynote of their family, social, official, and national life, and because it is so 'their days are long in the land God has given them.' "

Thus Sir Robert Hart. I ask no better testimonial. Here are no superhuman virtues, no abnegation of self, no fanatic repudiation of fundamental facts of human nature. But here is a life according to a rational ideal; and here is a belief in that ideal so effective and profound that it has gone far to supersede the use of force. "They believe in right," says Sir Robert Hart—let me quote it once more—"they believe in right so firmly that they scorn to think it requires to be supported or enforced by might." Yes, it is we who do not accept it that practise the Gospel of peace; it is you who accept it that trample it underfoot. And—irony of ironies!—it is the nations of Christendom who have come to us to teach us by sword and fire that Right

in this world is powerless unless it be supported by Might! Oh, do not doubt that we shall learn the lesson! And woe to Europe when we have acquired it! You are arming a nation of four hundred millions! a nation which, until you came, had no better wish than to live at peace with themselves and all the world. In the name of Christ you have sounded the call to arms! In the name of Confucius we respond!

VIII

Hitherto I have avoided any discussion in detail of the existing political and commercial relations between ourselves and the West, and of the events which led up to the situation we all deplore. I have endeavored rather to enlist your sympathies in the general character of our civilization, to note the salient points in which it differs from your own, and to bring into relief the more fundamental and permanent conditions which render an understanding between us so difficult and so precarious. I cannot, however, disguise from myself that even a sympathetic reader may fairly demand of me something more; and that if I am to satisfy him, I am bound, however unwillingly, to enter upon the field of current controversy. For, he may reasonably inquire, If it be really true that your people possess the qualities you ascribe to them, if they be indeed so just, so upright, so averse

to violence, how is it that they have committed the greatest breach of international comity that is known in the history of the civilized world? How is it that they have been guilty of acts which have shocked and outraged the moral sense of communities, according to you, less cultured and humane than themselves?

In reply, I will urge that I have never asserted that the Chinese are saints. I have said, and I still maintain, that if they are left to themselves, if the order to which they are accustomed is not violently disturbed, they are the most peaceful and law-abiding nation on the face of the earth. If, then, they have broken loose from their secular restraints, if they have shown for a moment those claws of the brute which no civilization, be it yours or ours, though it may sheathe, will ever draw, the very violence of the outbreak serves only to prove how intense must have been the provocation. Do you realize what that provocation was? I doubt it! Permit me then briefly to record the facts.

When first your traders came to China it was

not at our invitation; yet we received them, if not with enthusiasm, at least with tolerance. So long as they were content to observe our regulations we were willing to sanction their traffic, but always on the condition that it should not disturb our social and political order. To this condition, in earlier days, your countrymen consented to conform, and for many years, in spite of occasional disputes, there was no serious trouble between them and us. The trouble arose over a matter in regard to which you yourselves have hardly ventured to defend your own conduct. A considerable part of your trade was the trade in opium. The use of this drug, we observed, was destroying the health and the morals of our people, and we therefore prohibited the trade. Your merchants, however, evaded the law; opium was smuggled in; till at last we were driven to take the matter into our own hands and to seize and destroy the whole stock of the forbidden drug. Your Government made our action an excuse for war. You in-

vaded our territory, exacted an indemnity, and took from us the island of Hong-Kong. Was this an auspicious beginning? Was it calculated to impress us with a sense of the justice and fair play of the British nation? Years went on; a petty dispute about the privileges of the flag — a dispute in which we still believe that we were in the right — brought us once more into collision with you. You made the unfortunate conflict an excuse for new demands. In conjunction with the French you occupied our capital and imposed upon us terms which you would never have dared to offer to a European nation. We submitted because we must; we were not a military Power. But do you suppose our sense of justice was not outraged? Or later, when every Power in Europe on some pretext or other has seized and retained some part of our territory, do you suppose because we cannot resist that we do not feel? To a Chinaman who reviews the history of our relations with you during the past sixty

years and more must you not naturally appear to be little better than robbers and pirates? True, such a view is unduly harsh, and I do not myself altogether share it. A study of your official documents has convinced me that you genuinely believe that you have had on your side a certain measure of right, and I am too well aware of the complexity of all human affairs to deny that there may be something in your point of view. Still, I would ask you to consider the broad facts of the situation, dismissing the interminable controversies that arise on every point of detail. Which of us throughout has been the aggressor—we who, putting our case at the worst, were obstinately resolved to maintain our society, customs, laws, and polity against the influences of an alien civilization, or you who, bent on commercial gains, were determined at all cost to force an entrance into our territory and to introduce along with your goods the leaven of your culture and ideas? If, in the collision that inevitably ensued, we gave cause of offence, we had at least the excuse of

self-preservation. Our wrongs, if wrongs they were, were episodes in a substantial right; but yours were themselves the substance of your action.

Consider for a moment the conditions you have imposed on a proud and ancient empire, an empire which for centuries has believed itself to be at the head of civilization. You have compelled us, against our will, to open our ports to your trade; you have forced us to permit the introduction of a drug which we believe is ruining our people; you have exempted your subjects residing among us from the operation of our laws; you have appropriated our coasting traffic; you claim the traffic of our inland waters. Every attempt on our part to resist your demands has been followed by new claims and new aggressions. And yet all this time you have posed as civilized peoples dealing with barbarians. You have compelled us to receive your missionaries, and when they by their ignorant zeal have provoked our people to rise in mass against them, that again you have made an excuse for

new depredations, till we, not unnaturally, have come to believe that the cross is the pioneer of the sword, and that the only use you have for your religion is to use it as a weapon of war. Conceive for a moment the feelings of an Englishman subjected to similar treatment; conceive that we had permanently occupied Liverpool, Bristol, Plymouth; that we had planted on your territory thousands of men whom we had exempted from your laws; that along your coasts and navigable rivers our vessels were driving out yours; that we had insisted on your admitting spirits duty free to the manifest ruin of your population; and that we had planted in all your principal towns agents to counteract the teachings of your Church and undermine the whole fabric of habitual belief on which the stability of your society depends. Imagine that you had to submit to all this. Would you be so greatly surprised, would you really even be indignant, if you found one day the Chinese Legation surrounded by a howling mob and Confucian missionaries everywhere hunted to death?

What right then have you to be surprised, what right have you to be indignant at even the worst that has taken place in China? What is there so strange or monstrous in our conduct? A Legation, you say, is sacrosanct by the law of nations. Yes; but remember that it was at the point of the sword that you forced us to receive Embassies whose presence we have always regarded as a sign of national humiliation. But our mobs were barbarous and cruel. Alas! yes. And your troops? And your troops, nations of Christendom? Ask the once fertile land from Peking to the coast; ask the corpses of murdered men and outraged women and children; ask the innocent mingled indiscriminately with the guilty: ask the Christ, the lover of men, whom you profess to serve, to judge between us who rose in mad despair to save our country and you who, avenging crime with crime, did not pause to reflect that the crime you avenged was the fruit of your own iniquity!

Well, it is over—over, at least, for the moment. I do not wish to dwell upon the past.

Yet the lesson of the past is our only guide to the policy of the future. And unless you of the West will come to realize the truth; unless you will understand that the events which have shaken Europe are the Nemesis of a long course of injustice and oppression; unless you will learn that the profound opposition between your civilization and ours gives no more ground why you should regard us as barbarians than we you; unless you will treat us as a civilized Power and respect our customs and our laws; unless you will accord us the treatment you would accord to any European nation and refrain from exacting conditions you would never dream of imposing on a Western Power—unless you will do this, there is no hope of any peace between us. You have humiliated the proudest nation in the world; you have outraged the most upright and just; with what results is now abundantly manifest. If ignorance was your excuse, let it be your excuse no longer. Learn to understand us, and in doing so learn better to understand yourselves. To contribute to this end has been

my only object in writing and publishing these letters. If I have offended, I regret it; but if it is the truth that offends, for that I owe and I offer no apology.

THE END

John F. Kennedy Memo
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